

History of Warner Robins

Geographically located in the center of Georgia, Houston County was established in 1821 during the Treaty of Indian Springs. For nearly fifty years the town was known as York until after the Civil War when the Georgia Southern and Florida Railroad connected from Macon to Perry. Land was donated by Henry Feagin Jr. to Chief Engineer William H. Wells to build a train station for York. The community was later named Wellston after Wells, and served as a whistle stop for the next sixty years surrounded by dairy farms, corn fields, peach orchards, and pecan groves. When the Great Depression hit the country in the early 1930's, business leaders took an interest in the growing defense industry. The Middle Georgia business community invited the U.S. Army to build an aviation field in the region. In June 1941 after much competition with other sites, the War Department announced the approval of the site sixteen miles south of Macon and just east of the railroad on what is known today as Highway 247 in Warner Robins. Land was purchased from 47 local families, totaling 3,108 acres, for just over \$97,000 and the land was donated to the Army in August 1941. Formal groundbreaking of the air field took place that September. The City of Wellston agreed to build 2,000 affordable homes for new residents along with the town's first official school and other civic buildings. The town's business district known as Commercial Circle, now the intersection of Davis Drive and Watson, was flourishing. The town's first depot commander Colonel Charles E. Thomas lobbied to change the name of the town to Warner Robins after his late mentor and one of the air corps' first logisticians Brigadier General Augustine Warner Robins. In September of 1942 citizens of Wellston agreed to rename the town and the following March, Warner Robins was incorporated. During World War II, Robins Air Field employed approximately 23,000 personnel and the new city was growing rapidly. When the war was over, the work force was reduced to 3,900 until 1947. Robins Field was re-designated Robins Air Force Base when the escalation of the Korean and Cold War created new jobs in the City of Warner Robins. Both the population of the city and the workforce continues to grow today. Warner Robins Air Force Base currently employs approximately 20,000 residents of the City of Warner Robins.

Warner Robins Fun Facts

- Did you know that the First Bulldog Mascot for the University of Georgia came from Warner Robins. Want to know more? Stop by the E.L. Greenway Welcome Center.
- If you look across Watson Boulevard from the E.L. Greenway Welcome Center, toward Martin's Barbecue Restaurant, this is the location where the first theatre in Warner Robins. The theatre was called Wellston Theatre until April of 1954 when it was renamed RAMA Theatre.
- The first and oldest church in Warner Robins is Pleasant Hill Primitive Baptist Church, located on Pleasant Hill Road, and is still in existence today.
- Warner Robins' First and Oldest Neighborhood of 2,000 homes in "Robins Manor," built in 1942, near the North Side of Commercial Circle.
- Charles Thomas School was the first constructed school building in Wellston and now serves as classrooms for Middle Georgia State College on Watson Boulevard near the Nola Brantley Library.
- The first Mayor of Warner Robins, was known as "Boss Watson." His home was located where McCall's Sandwich Shop currently stands today in Commercial Circle.



E.L. Greenway Welcome Center
99 Armed Forces Boulevard, No.
Warner Robins, GA 31093
***478-922-5100 **888-288-9742**
www.warnerrobinsvisitorscenter.com



E.L. Greenway Welcome Center

The E.L. Greenway Welcome Center is located at 99 Armed Forces Blvd, North, in Warner Robins, just across Hwy 247 from Robins Air Force Base. The first train went through Wellston in 1889 when Georgia Southern & Florida Railroad opened between Macon and Perry, Georgia. Though this is the second depot in the City of Warner Robins, the original Wellston depot was donated by the Southern Railway to Rev. Dorsey Ellis. It was moved in 1944 and is now part of the First Presbyterian Church on Watson Boulevard located near Davis Drive. Replacing the smaller wooden structure located on what was once a dairy farm and now Robins Air Force Base, the Warner Robins Depot, now used as the City's Welcome Center, was built during World War II in 1944 as the city flourished. Though the depot has not been used for railroad purposes since 1970, much history has taken place during the life of this depot. As you walk into the main door in today's welcome center, you will step back in time to the original paint colors, light fixtures, pictures, and even original benches from the time period. This remarkable structure was designated a National Historic Site in 2008 and with the assistance of the staff you will receive more information on history of the E.L. Greenway Welcome Center and the City of Warner Robins.





X556 CABOOSE

Use of the caboose began in the 1830's when railroads housed the crew in structures built on top of flatcars. In 1863, lookout posts were designed on top of the caboose for a much easier view of the entire train; this was called a Cupola. The caboose provided an office for the conductor and minimal living quarters during long trips that were decorated for their home away from home. Times prior to air brakes, a flagman and brakeman were aboard in order to keep watch and warn the front of the train of "hotboxes", or overheated wheels on cars.



The X556 Caboose was built in 1971 by Southern Railway and donated to the City of Warner Robins in 2000 by Norfolk Southern. Known as a "Bay Window" caboose, this model eliminated the risk of the crew falling while in the cupola and the need for additional clearances in tunnels and overpasses. This model has two sets of bay windows, on each side of the structure allowing the view of each side of the train. The bay window caboose was tested in 1923-1930 on the west coast and seemed more safe and effective than traditional cabooses until technology improved and the length of trains began to grow in late 1900's. Cabooses were then replaced by "End of Train Devices" in 1984 that electronically monitored the manual work of the traditional train crew.

MILDRED'S COUNTRY STORE



The original location of the store was at the corner of Todd Road and U.S. Highway 41. Exact build date is unknown, but assumed to be somewhere around 1900. The store was moved to the Houston County Fairgrounds located on Dunbar Road in Warner Robins. The store remained there until the City of Warner Robins bought the building in 2002 for historical preservation. Inside you will find many antiques; some of what the store originally sold in the beginning and also items from the time periods throughout the years in which the store operated.

In the early operating times, store goods sold were corn, tobacco, flour, and even firearm ammo. Toward the 1950's when grocery stores began to open in the area; Mildred's Country store was used as a one stop shop that inventoried a variety of items from small hardware, tobacco, tools, some non-perishable food items and even a barber shop.



Today, the City of Warner Robins plans to re-open Mildred's Country Store in the near future as part of the E.L. Greenway Welcome Center. The store will serve as a museum and represent one of the first buildings in the history and development of Warner Robins.



ELBERTA TRAIN DEPOT

Believed to have been built in 1918, the Elberta train depot was originally located on what is now the corner of Elberta Road and Georgia Highway 247. Since the construction of the railroad in Houston County dates back to September of 1881, the Elberta depot is a significant landmark for the area. The depot served the residents of Houston County as a whistle stop for transporting produce to the surrounding area.

When the train did not stop anymore, the depot began to be used as a warehouse for many years. The Elberta depot was uncovered once again when a local salvage yard in Warner Robins, was torn down in 1983. As a myth of the city for many; there stood an old train depot hidden inside four walls of an existing building on the property. When uncovered, the building was moved to the Houston County Fairgrounds located on Dunbar Road to be used as the senior activity center until the city purchased the building in 2002 for historical preservation.

The City of Warner Robins moved the Elberta Train Depot in 2003, it now stands on Armed Forces Blvd next to the E.L. Greenway Welcome Center. With the assistance of a \$50,000 Transportation Grant, the future is looking bright for the old depot. Restoration for use as a transportation museum tracing the railroad systems back to the days of Wellston and the role railroads played in the development of Robins Air Force Base and Warner Robins.